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Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 064140

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 064140

LIMDIS TOSEC 873

FOLL REPEAT LISBON 1584 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BONN LONDON LOURENCO MARQUES LUANDA MADRID PARIS NATO DIA USCINCEUR USNMR SHAPE BRUSSELS OPORTO PONTA DELGADA
20 MAR 75 QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 1584

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PO
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH ADMIRAL ANTONIO ALVA ROSA COUTINHO, MEMBER OF REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL

1. LUNCHED ALONE TODAY WITH ADMIRAL ROSA COUTINHO. LUNCH SUBSTITUTED FOR ONE WE HAD SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 11, BUT I HAD MADE CLEAR IN ISSUING INVITATION FOR SECOND LUNCH THAT I WISHED NOT ONLY TO MEET COUTINHO BUT TO TALK TO HIM INFORMALLY IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION INVESTIGATING MARCH 11 EVENTS. COUTINHO IS CLEARLY ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN PORTUGAL TODAY, AND HIS VIEWS MUST BE GIVEN CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT. I WAS CONCERNED HOW HIS COMMISSION MIGHT APPROACH THE CHARGES OF US INVOLVEMENT, AND BROACHED THE SUBJECT INDIRECTLY.
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PAGE 02 STATE 064140

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

2. COUTINHO AGREED THAT COUP WAS AN ILL-CONCEIVED AND BASICALLY STUPID UNDERTAKING. HE READILY DISMISSED CHARGES OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT. HE NODDED HIS ASSENT WHEN I TOLD HIM THE UNITED STATES WOULD NEVER BE SO DUMB AS TO MAKE STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT AND OFFER AID ON THE ONE HAND AND ALLY ITSELF WITH A MOVEMENT DESTINED FOR FAILURE ON THE OTHER. HE ALSO AGREED WHEN I SAID THE TIMING COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE INOPPORTUNE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF WESTERN INTERESTS.

3. TOLD COUTINHO I WAS EXTREMELY CONCERNED WITH THE WAVE OF ANTI-AMERICANISM THAT HAD FOLLOWED MARCH 11 EVENTS AND THE VERY REAL RISK THAT U.S.-PORTUGUESE RELATIONS WOULD DETERIORATE. TOLD HIM OTELO HAD KNOWN HIS STATEMENT WAS FALSE WHEN HE MADE IT, AND THAT PRESS HAD TAKEN THIS STATEMENT AS LICENSE TO GO AFTER USG. THIS SITUATION COULD ONLY BE CORRECTED THROUGH BETTER COMMUNICATION BETWEEN US AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT.

4. COUTINHO AGREED THERE WAS A RISK THAT RELATIONS COULD DETERIORATE AND THAT THIS WAS NOT IN THE INTEREST OF EITHER PORTUGAL OR THE UNITED STATES. CHARACTERIZED OTELO AS A SINCERE MAN WHO FREQUENTLY PUTS HIS FOOT IN HIS MOUTH. HE SAID THAT JOURNALISTS LICK THEIR CHOPS WHEN OTELO HAS A PRESS CONFERENCE BECAUSE THEY KNOW THEY CAN BAIT HIM INTO A HEADLINE.

5. COUTINHO INDICATED THAT THERE WAS STILL A REACTION IN GOP RULING CIRCLES TO MARCH 11 EVENTS, AND THAT THAT REACTION WAS HIGHLY EMOTIONAL. RUMORS ABOUT THE US HAVE ABOUNDED: FOR EXAMPLE THE MINUTE THE FIRING BROKE OUT ON MARCH 11 HE HAD A REPORT THAT 14 AMERICANS (PRESUMABLY CIA) HAD ARRIVED AT THE HOTEL GUINCHO IN ESTORIL. HE WAS ABLE TO PUT IT DOWN BY POINTING OUT THAT CIA WOULD HARDLY SEND 14 MEN TO A PROMINENT HOTEL, BUT FACT THAT IT WAS WIDELY BELIEVED IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF CLIMATE IN PORTUGAL TODAY.

6 AS FAR AS ATTACKS ON ME WERE CONCERNED, COUTINHO LIKENED THEM TO CHARGES THAT HE WAS "RED ADMIRAL," WHICH EMANATED FROM WHITE COMMUNITY WHEN HE WAS IN ANGOLA. THAT MADE HIS TASK MORE DIFFICULT, JUST AS CHARGES AGAINST ME MADE MY TASK MORE DIFFICULT. HE ALSO NOTED THAT IN WORLD ENVIRONMENT
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TODAY ANYTHING THAT HAPPENS IS AUTOMATICALLY BLAMED ON CIA.

7. IN COUTINHO'S VIEW, WHAT US AND EUROPE NEEDED MOST TO UNDERSTAND WAS PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE WHICH EXISTED IN PORTUGAL. THE PORTUGUESE HE SAID WERE BOTH "PROUD AND AFRAID." THEIR REACTION TO CRITICISM WAS TO GO AHEAD AND DO JUST WHAT THEY WERE CRITICIZED FOR DOING. HENCE EXAGGERATED FEARS OF COMMUNISM WHICH APPEARED REGULARLY IN EUROPEAN AND US PRESS

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

WERE TOTALLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

8. COUTINHO VOLUNTEERED AS EXAMPLE OF EPISODE WHICH HAD CAUSED A VERY STRONG COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE REACTION WITHIN AFM THE STORY ON SOVIET REQUEST FOR FISHING BOAT FACILITIES AT FIGUEIRA DA FOZ. EVERYONE KNEW THAT FIGUEIRA DA FOZ COULD NOT ACCOMMODATE TRAWLERS, BUT WEST HAD REACTED IN INSENSITIVE WAY. NATOSYG LUNS REPORTED COMMENT ON THIS SUBJECT WAS PARTICULARLY RESENTED. NATOSYG'S MORE RECENT COMMENTS ABOUT POSSIBLE PORTUGUESE WITHDRAWAL FROM NATO ALSO HAD BEEN BADLY RECEIVED.

9. COUTINHO RECOGNIZED THERE WAS LITTLE WE COULD DO ABOUT PRESS CRITICISM OF GOP, BUT HE UNDERSCORED REPEATEDLY THAT CRITICISM ONLY RESULTED IN YOUNGER MEMBERS OF AFM DIGGING IN THEIR HEELS. BLURRING DISTINCTION BETWEEN USG AND PRESS HE SAID THAT PRESSURE ON GOP ONLY RESULTED IN RESENTMENT; IT WAS TOTALLY "COUNTERPRODUCTIVE" (HIS WORD, WHICH HE REPEATED FREQUENTLY). PORTUGAL RECOGNIZED THAT IT WAS A EUROPEAN COUNTRY AND WOULD ALWAYS BE, BUT IT HAD TO FIND ITS OWN WAY TOWARDS SOCIALISM. SOCIAL INJUSTICES HAD TO BE CORRECTED. PREVAILING MOOD WITHIN AFM COORDINATING COMMITTEE WAS THAT US AND EUROPE WERE TRYING TO DICTATE SOLUTIONS FOR PORTUGAL, AND LECTURE TO PROVISIONAL GOP. IF INSTEAD EUROPE AND AMERICA WOULD HELP PORTUGAL FIND ITS OWN SOLUTION, RELATIONS WOULD APPROVE.

10. TOLD ROSA COUTINHO WE HAD TRIED TO DO JUST THAT THROUGH OUR STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT AND OUR AID PROGRAM, BUT IN LIGHT OF ANTI-AMERICANISM I WONDERED IF THAT APPROACH WAS REALLY FRUITFUL. COUTINHO SAID OUR AID PROGRAM HAD BEEN VERY WELL HANDLED AND WAS WIDELY APPRECIATED. FACT THAT WE WERE OFFERING AID HAD HAD PROFOUND EFFECT ON AFM LEADERSHIP. HE COUNSELED
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MODERATION IN OUR RESPONSE TO ANTI-AMERICANISM (IT IS A FACT OF LIFE) AND URGED US TO CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD IN THE AREA OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION. FOR HIS PART HE SAID HE WOULD UNDERTAKE TO SEE THAT HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE AFM HAD MORE DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH THE EMBASSY.
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UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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